



Hebron Herald

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Further, we see that we cannot inherit the righteousness of our fathers. Any faith and obedience to God is put down to their account, not ours. There is no treasury of merit from which to draw if we are running low. Our parents may give us a leg up on getting the first house or buying a car or going to college, but they cannot give us their righteousness.

The fact is, we all stand or fall on our own. Judgment before the Lord is individual. We will give an account for ourselves and no one else (2 Cor. 5:10). In this truth we ought to rejoice. Would it be nice if a parent could give some righteousness to a weak or wayward child? No. If that could happen, then they must also share their sins. One goes with the other. If we are to share moral character, then we must share the good and bad. I for one do not want to answer for any more sin than what I have committed; it is enough.

There is no inherited righteousness, but there is no inherited sin either. In this we can rejoice. Our standing before God is between us and Him alone. None can lift us up, but neither can they drag us down.

- Steven F. Deaton

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“Mystery Worshipper”

That was the title of an article in *The Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 9, 2008). It highlights a growing service where churches hire a “mystery worshipper” to evaluate the church and its facilities. This is a new niche and twist on the mystery shopper used by retail stores for decades.

The service provider profiled in the article gave critiques on faded stripes in the parking lot, water stains on the ceiling, stuff odors in the children’s area, dust bunnies, and bad light bulbs. He also grades the friendliness of the congregation and if the preacher’s sermon is flat or engaging. This is all in an attempt to bring modern marketing practices to churches that are stagnant or losing members. “Church leaders say they’re seeking new ways to assess their services and evaluate everything from the style of music to how comfortable the pews are as they court fickle churchgoers.” The problem some are running into, as stated in the article, is there is no “brand loyalty” among church goers. In other words, they will hop from one denomination to another seeking a place that pleases them the most.

Let us reflect on this from a biblical perspective.

First, the Bible knows nothing of different “brands” of Christianity. There is but one church in the New Testament. It is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:4). Its head is Christ with a body made up of the redeemed. The saved in various locations band together in work and worship as congregations, or local churches (Acts 9:26-28; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2). Denominational branding simply stirs rivalry and strife, not to

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mention confusion over what the true religion of Jesus is.

Next, anyone who knows me knows that I am a stickler for “little” things. Dust bunnies, flickering lights, odors, and a warm auditorium bother me. However, these things have nothing to do with worshipping in spirit and truth. Should we have a nice, well kept building? Yes. Congregations ought to take care of the facility that was paid for with the Lord’s money. To let it fall into disrepair is poor stewardship. Yet, the priority should not be on the physical building.

The focus of the mystery worshipper system is on the superficial. It ought to be on the spiritual. Is the congregation worshipping in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:23, 24)? If not, it does not matter how clean and attractive the facilities are. If the worship is not right, the “atmosphere” is irrelevant. It may be the most appealing any man ever saw, but it is all in vain (cf. Matt. 15:7-9).

Further, the evaluation of the preacher’s sermon is based on an arbitrary standard of flat or engaging. Yes, I believe a sermon needs to be “easy” to listen to. I have heard some sermons that make me want to stick an ice pick in my ears. Preachers have a responsibility to design and deliver a sermon that will keep the attention of the audience as best he can. His primary obligation, though, is to make sure it is scriptural (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Pet. 4:11). The lesson needs to honor God and consider the souls of men either in edification or evangelism. Even “flat” lessons can do this when Bible-based. (Besides, every preacher has an off day, as I can attest.)

There is One who observes every gathering, the Lord. He knows and sees all. This is the One with whom we need to be concerned. What is His evaluation of our worship? Instead of hiring a “mystery worshipper,” churches need to open their Bibles. It will critique them in light of truth. It will provide a true assessment of where they stand before the Lord, which is what matters; not whether or not they are attractive to “fickle churchgoers.”

Finally, and frankly, should we be concerned and bend over backward to attract “fickle churchgoers”? The Lord said the lukewarm make Him want to vomit (Rev. 3:16). If a person is not committed to pleasing God, then why bother with them beyond trying to get them to see that error? If a person is determined to find a church that pleases

them, where they can find a comfortable pew, an entertaining sermon, and activities for the kids, then we need to invite them to go elsewhere. While we are interested in the souls of men and want one and all to be saved, we need to exercise judgment in our time and efforts. The Lord said not to throw what is holy to the dogs (Matt. 7:6). We should to look for and invest in those who want to please the Savior, not self.

No Inherited Righteousness ...Or Sin

In Ezekiel 18 the Lord refutes a false proverb found among the people. They said, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Eze. 18:2). They thought what the fathers did would be held against the children. It was wrong then and is wrong now.

The Lord replied to this erroneous idea by give a series of statements about righteous and unrighteous men and their sons. He said that the righteous man who has an unrighteous son will live, but the son will die (Eze. 18:5-13). The unrighteous man who has a righteous son will die, but his son will live (Eze. 18:11-18).

The people come back with the question, “Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?” God’s answer was, “Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live” (Eze. 18:19). The climax of it all is Ezekiel 18:20, “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

Here we have a complete refutation of the Calvinistic doctrine of inherited sin. It contends that all men have inherited Adam’s sin and are therefore unable to do any righteousness; the Holy Spirit must directly infuse them with faith to be saved. Under Calvinism, man cannot choose to be saved; God chooses us individually.

Ezekiel 18 shows us that sin and its guilt do not pass from father to son. If this is true for your father and my father, is it not also true for the father of us all? Was this true for Cain, Abel, and Seth? If not, why not?